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GERMANY

Declaration of Loyalty to Bishop Dibelius

(Berlin) - Dr. Otto Dibelius, Bishop of Berlin-Brandenburg, president of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) and one of the seven presidents of the World Council of Churches, was unable to preach the main sermon at the traditional annual Kurmark Kirchentag. Bishop Dibelius pioneered the Kirchentag thirty years ago.

For the second time the authorities of the German Democratic Republic refused to grant him a visa to go to Potsdam. The other refusal was in 1953. About a thousand people attended the Kirchentag, which is held every year in the week after Whitsun.

The meeting affirmed its loyalty to Bishop Dibelius. In addresses and discussions, pastors, church workers and church members repeatedly criticised defamatory references to the bishop in the East German press, and steps taken to prevent him from exercising his office (see EPS No. 15/16). Kirchentag worship included intercession for the bishop.

A letter from Bishop Dibelius to the local churches was read at the main service. It emphasised that severe attacks of this kind on the spiritual life of the Church had always the effect of drawing Christians into closer unity. The bishop said he could only repeat what he had written to his pastors in 1933, shortly before he was removed from office by the National Socialists. He did not intend to remain silent out of fear of the consequences; he must deliver the message entrusted to him. If the result was a struggle, he would stand or fall with God. Even if the authorities prevented him from joining the members of his churches, they could still meet in the fellowship of intercession.

An American church leader, Dr. Reginald Helfferich from St. Louis, USA, was also at first refused a permit to attend the Potsdam meeting. He pointed out to East Berlin authorities that he had twice been to the Soviet Union and had just returned from Moscow and was then granted permission to go to Potsdam for three days.



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In an address broadcast at Whitsun, Herr Dieckmann, president of the National Chamber (Volkskammer) of the German Democratic Republic, also sharply attacked Bishop Dibelius. He maintained that the bishop was the man mainly responsible for making the Evangelical Church in West Germany "one of the main bulwarks of the revived military system".

E.P.S., Geneva

UNITED KINGDOM

National Conference on Work for Christian Unity

A Whitsuntide conference called at Swanwick, Derbyshire, by the British Council of Churches brought a hundred and fifty delegates from all parts of the British Isles into a discussion on mission and unity at the local level. Opening the meeting, which was attended by members of nine different denominations, Mr. Philip Race, vice-president elect of the British Methodist Conference, said that the present generation was "the first that was likely to see great things happening in ecumenical matters during its lifetime".

Dr. Marcus Ward, formerly of the Church of South India and now tutor in New Testament at Richmond College (Methodist) said that the "issue of priorities" had to be faced by Christians at the local level. They must decide "whether in fact ecumenical activities or one's own denomination have first call on one's time".

Following up the same idea in his description of "Fellowship in the Local Parish", Canon Ernest Southcott of Halton, Leeds, who has conducted an experiment in taking the regular life of the church into the houses of his parishioners, declared that "any church which organises an evangelistic enterprise but ignores the Christians of other churches is in fact ignoring Christ". He said he believed it was "little short of blasphemy" to conduct any mission on such lines.

Bible study on "Johah, the Runaway Prophet" was led by the Rev. Edward Patey, secretary of the Youth Department of the British Council of Churches. The conference, which decided to try to induce adjacent local churches of different denominations to send participants to a similar meeting next year, was chaired by the general secretary of the British Council of Churches, the Rev. Kenneth Slack.

E.P.S., Geneva

GERMANY

Moravian Brethren Celebrate Five Hundredth Anniversary

Over a thousand visitors flocked into the small Black Forest village of Königsfeld between June 13 and 17 to celebrate simultaneously the 500th anniversary of the founding of the first Moravian community (Brüderunität) in Czechoslovakia, and the 150th anniversary of the founding of Königsfeld as a Moravian "forest settlement". They sang traditional hymns in the open air under the trees, joined in worship in the gleaming white-painted interior of their church, heard a series of lectures on the early history and development of Moravianism and visited two exhibitions - on Moravian History and "Old Königsfeld".

Among the visitors were Moravians from Hermhut in East Germany, Czechoslovakia, England, the USA and Holland, and from Moravian mission fields in Central America, Alaska, Labrador, South, West and Southeast Africa, the West Indies and Tibet. On Sunday June 16 representatives of the West German Federal Government, the Moravians in Czechoslovakia and the World Council of Churches were among those who brought greetings.

The decision has aroused discussion in Greece because the Church, like the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, has generally included bishops and clergy in its delegations.

A letter of protest against the decision, signed by four lay theologians, professors Hamilcar S. Alivisatos, Constantin Bonis, Gerassimos Konidaris and B. Vellas was "found unacceptable" by the April meeting of the Church's Holy Synod.

"Ecclesia" also reports that at the same meeting the Holy Synod accepted the resignation of Prof. Alivisatos as member and as secretary general of the Synodal Committee on Relations with Foreign Churches. Prof. Alivisatos had been appointed to this post, which included the administration of inter-church aid matters for the Church of Greece, very soon after the war. The other members of the committee are for the present term as follows: His Beatitude the Archbishop of Athens and All Greece, Dorotheos (president), the Most Rev. the Metropolitans of Syros (Philaretos), of Patras (Theoklitos) and of Cassandria (Kallinikos), and the university Professors Panayotis Bratsiotis and Basil Johannides. The Holy Synod had appointed the Very Reverend Archimandrite Damaskinos Papachristou to administer the work of this committee. E.P.S., Geneva

H-Bomb Remains Centre of Concern

Among further statements issued by churches in East and West expressing grave concern at the continuation of hydrogen bomb tests are resolutions of the Bengal Christian Council and the Synod of the Christian Missionary Church in Belgium. Both statements demand that the nations submit themselves to Christ's law of love.

The Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Province of Mecklenburg (DDR) and the office-bearers of the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland have protested against the misuse of atomic energy and the menace presented to the human race by weapons of mass destruction.

The "Church Peace Alliance" of Switzerland (a Christian peace movement) has requested the Swiss Federal Council to offer its services to the United Nations to promote disarmament negotiations and establish an international legal system based on justice and peace. It urged the Federal Council to approach the states involved and the UN to secure immediate cessation of atom-bomb and hydrogen experiments, suggesting that Switzerland should help the under-developed countries of the world by granting loans.

E.P.S., Geneva

NORWAY

Berggrav Takes up Toynbee's Challenge

Bishop Eivind Berggrav of Norway has taken up issues raised by Professor Arnold Toynbee, famous English historian. Discussing Toynbee's vision of a "world state with a world religion", as editor of "Church and Culture", the Bishop appeals for a re-consideration of the Christian attitude towards other world religions.

Professor Toynbee, Dr. Berggrav points out, has argued that the great religions should recognise one another and work out a form of "peaceful coexistence". The English philosopher of history says that international cooperation is increasing in all realms of life and the only way to prevent society from declining

into materialism is to emphasise religious values and strengthen the personal relationship between men and God. Toynbee says that all forms of higher faith in God should be encouraged and treated as spiritual foundations for society.

Bishop Berggrav replies that Christians have no right to reject Toynbee's view out of hand because they find it shocking and repellent. He says the fact that Christians cannot abandon their convictions about the unique position of Jesus Christ makes unprejudiced reception of Professor Toynbee's ideas difficult. The bishop declares that, on the other hand, Christianity itself, if it despised the other great religions as a matter of course, could not be acquitted of the charge that it took up a "superior" attitude.

"There can be no question of leaving Christian missions in the lurch," Bishop Berggrav concludes, "but we must review our opinions, and especially the tone of voice we adopt towards the great religious systems of Asia. More, we should reflect as to whether we can afford to be held guilty, by refusing 'co-existence', of promoting a mixture of non-Christian religions, or even a negation of belief within all religions, and especially our own." The examination of these problems, according to the bishop, is "unpleasant and difficult", but must not be shirked.

E.P.S., Geneva

Office-Bearers Chosen for European Church Body

The secretariat of the provisional Council of European Churches formed at Liselund, Denmark, (see EPS No. 22) will be in the Netherlands. A provisional working committee, with power to co-opt, includes Pastor Paul Conord of Paris, Dr. H. Hildebrandt (Berlin), Dr. Heinz Kloppenburg (Dortmund), Bishop Zygmunt Michalis (Warsaw), Pastor Gyula Muraközy (Budapest), Dr. Ernst Wilm (Bielefeld), Pastor A. Ribet (Milan) and Professor Josef B. Soucek (Prague). Representatives from Switzerland and from a "free church" are to be appointed. Dr. Heinrich Held of the Rhineland, Dr. Egbert Emmen of The Hague and Archbishop Kiivit of Estonia form a provisional executive.

E.P.S., Geneva

In Brief

83 Protestant pastors and 19 church officials accepted an invitation from the National Front (the overall organisation of the parties and popular associations in the German Democratic Republic) to attend a meeting at the Wartburg, where a statement was issued urging Christian citizens to vote for candidates on the lists of the "National Front" at the forthcoming East German elections. The pastors and laymen went unofficially. Church leaders in Berlin say that the Evangelical Church cannot be associated with explicitly political statements.

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In connection with the approaching elections in the Federal German Republic, Chancellor Konrad Adenauer states that the crucial point is "whether Germany will remain Christian or turn Communist". This statement drew a petition from the students of the Wuppertal theological college. Addressed to Dr. Adenauer, it asked him "to respect the fact that Christians are free to decide for any democratic party". They say the continuity of Christendom is not to be guaranteed by a particular political programme.

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The Roman Catholic Bishop of Münster, Dr. H. Keller, has told a Catholic workers' conference in his diocese that a convinced Catholic cannot be an active

socialist or vote for the Social Democratic Party in the forthcoming German Federal elections. He said the Social Democratic Party was opposed to the Roman Catholic Church on all vital cultural and political questions.

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Dr. Istvan Bibo, a well-known layman in the Hungarian Reformed Church and a member of the cabinet of Dr. Imre Nagy during last year's revolt, has been arrested. Dr. Bibo, who was for many years an active member of the National Peasant's Party and a former Professor of Sociology at the University of Szeged, was a socialist. He was the only member of the Nagy government who did not seek refuge in a foreign embassy at the time of the revolt and has been living since then in his own home.

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Pastor Lajos Gulyas, of the Reformed Church of Hungary, has been condemned to death after a fortnight's trial of Hungarian "counter-revolutionaries" at Györ, in western Hungary.

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The Dutch Ecumenical Council has sent a document to its member bodies, expressing uneasiness because most Christians accept Church disunity as a matter of course. The Council said that there was still little sense of wider responsibility in the congregations and proposed methods of local cooperation with other churches designed to overcome the problem.

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A church conference held in Addis Ababa has discussed relationships between the Church of Ethiopia and the Coptic Patriarchate of Alexandria. The meeting was attended by Ethiopian Archbishop Basilius, and nine bishops. The throne of the Coptic Patriarch has been vacant since Amba Youssab II died last

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Dr. J.F. Ayorinde, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Lagos, Nigeria, has been appointed director of the new Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation. He is one of two vice-presidents of the Baptist World Alliance.

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Dr. Gerhard May, Bishop of the Evangelical Church in Austria, and Bishop Stefan Laszlo, Apostolic Legate to the Hungarian refugees in Austria, have sent a joint request to the US State Department, urging the USA to continue to grant right of entry to Hungarian refugees in Austria.

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State pressure on the universities and theological colleges continues in East Germany. The quota of theological students in the DDR has been cut by one-third. There is an acute shortage of theological teachers. A recent state decision bars students of the preparatory evangelical theological seminary near Potsdam from entering university theological faculties. The preparatory school had been teaching ancient languages and enabled its students to embark at once on full theological courses.

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The Swiss Protestant Church Federation has protested to the Swiss Federal authorities against the consecration of new locomotives by Roman Catholic clergy. The Protestant churches point out that "the Swiss Federal Railways are the property of the whole Swiss people and should not have to submit to the religious ceremonies of a particular confession".

E.P.S., Geneva

